

and Mr. Fuller were inclined to consider the uncrested bird a distinct species.

APTERYX MANTELLI.

The few instances that Captain Hutton records do not suffice to make *Apteryx mantelli* a common species in the North Island. Its practical scarcity may be inferred from the fact that an offer of £5 for a specimen, which appeared some years ago in the Maori newspaper, failed to obtain one.

I must here record my total dissent from the opinion expressed by Captain Hutton, and based on the structure of the egg-shell, that *Apteryx* "belongs to the Carinate type of birds" (Trans. N. Z. Inst. iv. p. 167); for such a view is entirely opposed to the principles of modern classification.

XVI.—*Remarks on Mr. Legge's Paper on Ceylonese Birds.*

By E. W. H. HOLDSWORTH, F.L.S. &c.

THE publication of Mr. Legge's observations on the distribution of birds in the southern hill-region of Ceylon will doubtless be received with satisfaction by all who are interested in the somewhat peculiar avifauna of that island; and I especially am glad of the information he gives about a district with which I have had only a slight personal acquaintance. Mr. Legge is an active worker, and has told us some interesting ornithological news; but there are some points in connexion with particular species mentioned by him about which more precise information would be desirable, and one or two others which are perhaps open to criticism. As we are both anxious to have an accurate account of the manners and customs of the birds of the island placed on record, some comments will, I hope, not be considered altogether out of place.

The particular point of interest to me in Mr. Legge's paper is the record of the occurrence at 1500 or 2000 feet, in the south of the island, of birds hitherto supposed to be generally confined to the upper hills, and especially abundant at an elevation of about 6000 feet in the central province.

In my catalogue of the birds of Ceylon* I called attention to the migration of many of the resident species from one side of the island to the other at the times of the change of the monsoons, and also of some of the birds of the upper hills being met with periodically as low down as the neighbourhood of Kandy, at an elevation of only 1500 or 1600 feet, which is about the highest range of the general low-country species. The hill-birds Mr. Legge mentions as being found in the lower part of the southern hills, are just the same species which, at only certain seasons, are met with at corresponding elevations near Kandy; and the question is whether the same rule does not hold good in both cases—namely, that just at the change of the monsoons, when there is a general break-up of the weather, followed by a complete reversal of the direction of the wind, the hill-birds temporarily descend to lower districts. The most remarkable instance of what has been hitherto considered a purely hill-species being found by Mr. Legge very low down on the small ranges near the sea, is *Chrysocolaptes stricklandi*. This bird is resident in the country between 4000 and 8000 feet (the latter being the highest elevation in the island); and I have met with it most abundantly at about 6000 or 7000 feet, and, more or less, at all times of the year. Unfortunately, Mr. Legge rarely gives any hint as to the time of year when he has obtained the hill-species in the lower districts of which he speaks. A specimen of this Woodpecker, however, which he sent home for identification, and which came under my notice, was labelled as having been killed in March; and that is just the month, between the monsoons, when many of the hill-birds are met with about Kandy. It looks, therefore, in this case, as if the bird may have been only a visitor.

Among other species resident in the highest parts of the island, and which Mr. Legge found at only 2000 feet, are *Myiastestes cinereocapilla* and *Eumyias sordida*, and *Zosterops ceylonensis* as low as 1500. The first is, I believe, a hill-species in India, but descending to the plains in many places during winter; the other two are not known out of Ceylon,

* P. Z. S. 1872.

and it will be interesting to hear whether they remain at all seasons where Mr. Legge met with them. The occurrence of *Cissa ornata* in comparatively low country is not surprising, as it only visits the upper hills during winter, and at that time I expect Mr. Legge would not find it in his district.

There is nothing which better shows how much there is to reward a diligent collector in Ceylon than Mr. Legge's discovery of *Drymocapthus fuscicapillus* in some abundance near Galle. Only a few localities for this bird (most of them in the low country) had been previously recorded; but the expression "it appears to have escaped much observation hitherto in Ceylon" is likely to mislead those who may not be aware that the bird is peculiar to that island. The statement, however, that this species "is one of the commonest and most widely distributed birds in the southern province" will certainly require some qualification. Here, I suspect, the question of season will have to be considered; if not, it is difficult to understand why other collectors of considerable experience in looking for birds should not have met with this one in the south. In 1869 I spent the whole of the month of August collecting in parts of the southern province; during most of the time I was only about twelve miles inland from Galle, and sometimes making excursions to the lower hills near the Morowa Korle. Yet I never saw or heard *Drymocapthus*; and I think I could hardly have missed it had it been "one of the commonest birds" there, as, in the following month, whilst travelling across the centre of the island on my way to Trincomalie, I was attracted by some notes quite new to me, and after a little difficulty succeeded in shooting this very species whilst it was in the act of uttering them. It is remarkable also that Layard never met with this bird in the southern province, although, as the discoverer of the species, having first obtained it close to his house at Colombo, and afterwards in the centre of the island, he would not have been likely to pass it by. Two other collectors, one English and one native, have also done good work in the south, but did not meet with this bird. I think, then, it cannot be a constant resident there;

and possibly Mr. Legge's pen may have run away with him a little when he described the bird as one of the commonest in that province. He probably obtained it in several localities; but, curiously enough, he only mentions one.

Such remarks, also, as that *Palæornis calthropæ* is more abundant in two particular localities on the southern hills "than anywhere else in the island," and that *Merops philippinus* "is more abundant in the extreme south than in other parts of Ceylon," appear to me somewhat rash, considering Mr. Legge's military duties have prevented his having opportunities for long-continued observations anywhere except at Colombo, Galle, and Trincomalie. *P. calthropæ* is a great wanderer; but I did not meet with it in the south in August, although *P. rosa* was abundant near the Morowa Korle. *M. philippinus* used to be so abundant at Aripo, on the northern coast, from the end of September to April, that the very common *M. viridis*, a resident there, was scarce in comparison with it.

A matter of more consequence to those interested in the ornithological relations of Ceylon to other countries is that Mr. Legge calls the south-east coast of the island "that remarkably Indo-Ceylonese region" where all the peninsular birds found in the island are met with (p. 25). It would not be difficult to make a pretty long list of Indo-Ceylonese species which have not yet been recorded from there; but it is well known that the quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, insects, and plants of the northern portion of the island are specially Indian in their character, and that very few of the peculiar Ceylonese forms are found there. The latter are to be met with only in the southern half, with a few exceptions; and the northern half is undoubtedly the Indo-Ceylonese region.

There are many portions of Mr. Legge's interesting paper which deserve notice; but I must keep within the space at my command. I hope Mr. Legge will be able to clear up the mystery of the Devil bird; but he must not trust too much to the negative evidence afforded by the silence of his *Syrnium indranee*, as Owls rarely utter their peculiar cries in captivity. Remarkable vocal powers might be expected from *Batracho-*

stomus ; but the known range of that bird in Ceylon is far less than that in which the Devil-cry has been heard. I am able to add something to the history of *Prionochilus vincens*, as my friend Mr. Bligh has just obtained it on one of the coffee-estates, at about 4000 feet. He has sent me a minutely accurate description of the bird, and inquired if it were *P. vincens*, of which he had heard, but had not seen a description*. The birds were feeding on guavas and other fruit. He had also just shot a specimen of that rare Eagle, *Limnaetus kieneri*, which I believe has never before been met with so far south ; and he adds that Java Sparrows had by some means found their way to the Ceylon hills ; for he had been for some time watching a flock on the estate. It is as well to record this, as there can be little doubt about these strangers having been introduced.

To return to my subject in a few last lines, I think it is a pity the demands on Mr. Legge's time have prevented his making many little corrections which would have added to the value of his paper. He has made several alterations in specific names in accordance with my catalogue, which he told me he should do ; but *Spilornis cheela* and others still appear as Ceylonese birds, without just right to the title, and his *Tringa temminckii* proved to be *T. salina* when examined in this country. He has done good work, however, in the island ; and, besides the interesting novelty *Prionochilus vincens*, has added *Poliornis teesa*, *Phylloscopus magnirostris*, and *Prinia hodgsoni* to the Ceylonese list. I trust that Mr. Legge may be able to continue his labours and make many more such discoveries. At the same time I venture to hope that he will not think a few more particulars about dates and a little more precision of expression will detract from the value of his papers on Ceylonese birds.

* Among the numerous birds brought home more than thirty years ago from Ceylon by the late Mr. Hugh Cuming is a female of this species, in the British Museum ; it is in bad condition, and has been only recently identified.